# Spanning the Gap

## Boy Scout Camps along the Delaware River



Spanning the Gap
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#### by Albert B. Zusman

Between 1928 and 1972, an estimated 250,000 boy scouts camped along the Delaware River on land which is now part of Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Of the recreation area's 70,000 acres, more than 6% - about 4,600 acres - once belonged to Boy Scout camps.

The Boys Scouts of America were organized in 1910. The aim of their camping program has always been to develop character in boys and young men. Their Delaware River scout camps provided adventure and excitement in a safe, enjoyable, and beautiful countryside not far from major cities. Here many boys saw the sky clearly for the first time-free of the smoke, smog, and streetlights of the East's industrial cities. Here a hike up Kittatinny Ridge brought views of unlimited green valleys. Here a boy could grow to become a man, and grown men could remember and relive the joys of being young.



The author (right), his father (left) and a friend on their arrival for their first summer as campers.



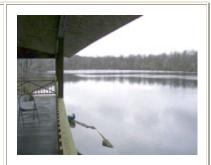


(Left) A "paddlerama" gets under way in the summer of 1969.

(Right) The mysteries of campfire stew.

#### Out in the country

It was most predictable that scouting would discover the valley of the Delaware. Thousands of years before, the Lenape Indians had lived and labored in the valley, and in the 1600s, Europeans had become aware of its potential. A vacation industry in the 1800s established the middle Delaware Valley as a place to get away from the crowding and heat of the cities. By the time Boy Scout camps opened in the 1920s, the valley was close enough for a week's visit, but still far enough to be "out in the country".



Catfish Pond from the boat house at **Camp Mohican** 2004.

#### Home away from home



The Boy Scouts had camping privileges at Weygadt throughout the 1920s, and acquired the land in 1928. The Bethlehem Council used the north area for Camp

Minsi, and the Easton Council used the south area for Camp Weygadt. In 1930 the Bethlehem Council moved its camp to the Poconos, and the entire parcel became known as Camp Weygadt.

Camp Pahaquarra was built along Old Mine Road in the 1920s, on the site of several copper mine ventures over the centuries. The camp re-used some of the mining buildings and foundations for the camp dining hall, camp store and office, and the home of the "ranger" or resident manager.

Like its older neighbor Camp Pahaquarra, Camp Cowaw fronted on the Delaware, but was largely "up on the hill.". Only about 30% of Cowaw's land was usable on a daily basis. *Abegg Lodge*, the nature center, spanned a deep ravine on stilt-like timbers. Scouts reached the lodge over a bridge from the opposite side of the ravine.

In 1926, a group of public-minded citizens in Newark sold a large and rugged upland parcel to the Boy



The Liddle Cabin at Camp Cowaw in 1963. Note the steep terrain. (Photo courtesy of Al Zusman.)



The access road to **Camp Cowaw** (Note the camp logo) is now overgrown with forest. The "column" at the entrance has disappeared in subsequent repairs to Old Mine Road. (Photo courtesy of Al Zusman.)

Scouts for \$1.00 to establish Camp Mohican. Civic organizations donated additional buildings. In its early years, the camp had little forest cover other than scrub, and scouts once put out a "forest fire" with a bucket brigade from the lake.



Whether a cabin, a leanto, or a war-surplus canvas tent, though, the campsite was the truly scout's home away from home. Troops tended to

reserve the same site year after year, sometimes adopting it for maintenance year-round. Troops also gave names to their sites, and adorned them with a flagpole, and perhaps an entrance gate or a totem pole.

(Above, top) The author's bunk at Camp Cowaw. (Photo courtesy of Al Zusman.) (Bottom) Entrance gate, Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec.



The oil house from the copper mine era around 1910. It became the trading post at **Camp Pahaquarra.** 



Todd Cabin, **Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec**, around 1970.

## Helping each other

Though each camp operated independently, staff soon found that borrowing and trading helped everybody. Camps Cowaw and Pahaquarra were so close, they behaved like next door neighbors, borrowing a cup or sugar or a pound of butter as needed. On Sunday morning, Catholic scouts went down the hill to Pahaquarra to Mass. Friday evenings found the Jewish scouts at Camp Calno, a private facility nearby on Old Mine Road, or at Camp Weygadt for *shabat*.

Hikers from other camps were always welcome. Camp Mohican, with its enticing "Wildcat Lake" (Catfish Pond) had well-worn paths to Camps Cowaw and Pahaquarra, as well as to Camp No-Be-Bos-Co, still in existence just outside the recreation area. (See below) Many scout canoe trips also "put out" at Camp Weygadt, right in the Gap.

Camp dining halls often hosted guests for meals and fellowship. Phone calls were "shared" too. Several



Scouts hiking along Kittatinny Ridge in the 1960s.



Getting a hike underway in 1968.

of the camps shared a Stroudsburg-to-New Jersey party line. Calls rang in all the camps, but a camp's staff would know if the call was for them by the pattern of the ring.



(Above) A composite image of the swimming hole (pond) at **Camp Weygadt** in 1970. Mt Minsi PA is to the left and Mt Tammany NJ to the right.



The mess hall at **Camp Weygadt**, today a storage facility. Scouts lined up on the far side of the lean-to addition at the right, at a door that is now encircled by a large screened-in porch.

#### The end of an era

In 1968, Camp Weygadt celebrated 50 years of camping but also announced: The Army Corps of Engineers is negotiating ... for the purchase of Camp Weygadt. An era was drawing to a close, as the Tocks Island Dam Project authorized the federal government to buy out landowners on both sides of the river from the Water Gap to Milford. The dam, though, was never built. At least one camp was offered the opportunity to repurchase its land, but its management refused; they had already moved on. All the land acquired from the Boy Scouts has remained in federal ownership and forms part of Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area.

The 1950s dining hall of **Camp Weygadt** now serves as a storage facility for the recreation area. The 225-foot-long swimming pool is now drained and the ranger's cabin has been demolished. Interstate 80, built in the 1960s, now makes it difficult to imagine the riverside feel of this camp for most of its life. Many campers who would have gone to Camp Weygadt now use Camp Minsi (another camp by this name, not the one at the Water Gap) and Trexler Scout Reservation in the Poconos.



The **Weygadt** swimming hole and Mt. Minsi PA today in winter 1997. The dam on the brook feeding the pond was removed around 2001 and the pond has since drained into the Delaware River.



The lodge at **Camp Mohican** today is used for Mohican Outdoor Center activities and

Further up the river from Camp Weygadt, one can still find foundations of **Camp Pahaquarra**-- themselves recycled from mining days. The camp's parade ground is now Coppermine parking lot, used by boaters and Appalachian Trail hikers. Neighboring **Camp Cowaw** has almost entirely disappeared into the forest. Its waterfront is now Poxono boat launch.

Pahaquarra and Camp Cowaw are now part of the Central Jersey Council. The current camp of this council is Kittatinny Mountain Scout Reservation in Stokes State Forest, on the eastern boundary of the recreation area. (See below)

The grounds of **Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec** were purchased by the newly-formed Orange Mountain Council in 1937. A year later, a group of scout leaders and their scouts built the camp's first major building, *Todd Cabin*. They did such a good job, Todd Cabin was still in use 35 years later when the property was sold. Several other early camp buildings have also survived with relatively little alteration.

Camp Mason (Ken-Etiwa-Pec) had a brief stint as an Urban League facility and also served the Passaic School System. It is currently a YMCA camp, **Camp Ralph S. Mason.** 

Camps Mohican and Ken-Etiwa-Pec, both large tracts with dozens of buildings, have survived as camps, under different auspices. After years of use by Trenton State College, a portion of **Camp Mohican** is now home to the Appalachian Mountain Club. Renamed **Mohican Outdoor Center**, the camp hosts recreational programs for all ages year-round. The scouts of Camp Mohican's founding Robert Treat Council now attend camps throughout the Northeast.

Though many old-timers will tell you *They just don't do it like they used to,* many scout camps throughout the nation have built on the past. Within a half hour's drive of the recreation area are many

the Ridgerunner store.



Todd cabin at **Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec** today. (NPS photo by Ken Sandri).



Name plaque on Todd Cabin 2006 **Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec**.



(Above) and (Below) Long Pine Pond, Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec, 2006.



thriving camps. Their new and challenging programs prove that camping can still be as exciting as it once was in the Delaware Valley.



(Left) In September of 2000 the author displayed his memorabilia from the 5 boy scout camps for Open House Day at at Bushkill Visitor Center PA. (Items courtesy of Al Zusman.)

#### A Postscript: Camps that live on

**Kittatinny Mountain Scout Reservation** on Fairview Lake just beyond the northwest boundary of the recreation area, is one of several scouting centers still active today in the Delaware Valley.





(Left) Fairview Lake, on the Appalachian Trail near Blue Mt. Lake Road in within the recreation area.

(Right) Ironwork on a footbridge at Kittatinny Mountain Scout Reservation. (Photo courtesy of Al Zusman.)

Camp No-Be-Bo-Sco (NOrth BErgen BOy SCOuts) was founded in 1927 on the shore of Sand Pond, just at the northwest boundary of what would become the recreation area. The camp lost 300 upland acres to the Tocks Island project, but survives to this day.





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(Left) Sand Pond seen from Kittatinny Ridge on the Appalachian Trail near Route 602 within the recreation area.

(Right) The flag still flying at No-Be-Bo-Sco.

Al Zusman (at top of feature and at right, giving a campfire program at Dingmans Campground) was a scout at Camp Cowaw in the 1950s.

A retired school principal, he served as a seasonal park ranger at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area from 1997 through 2003, and remains active as a scout instructor.

